

Running head: CULTURALLY RELEVANT ASSESSMENT PROCESSES

**DEVELOPING CULTURALLY RELEVANT ASSESSMENT PROCESSES FOR FIRST
NATIONS EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS**

by

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Bachelor of Social Work, Nicola Valley Institute of Technology 2012

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Abstract

This research investigated the possibility of developing an assessment tool for First Nations Early Childhood Development services that is respectful of First Nations worldviews and therefore culturally relevant, valid, and reliable. The research explored the successes and challenges of implementing early childhood assessment tools based upon Western society's worldview with First Nations children and established whether it would be realistic and desirable to create an assessment tool for First Nations child development. Through sharing circles, conversations, and stories, participants from the Māori people of New Zealand and First Nations early childhood educators in British Columbia provided insight for the need to develop an assessment tool based upon a First Nations worldview, including guidance and direction to develop the assessment tool. This research emphasizes the need to conduct research in partnership with Indigenous people and provides recommendations for best practices when social workers are working with Indigenous people.

Keywords: Indigenous, First Nations, Māori, Early Childhood Education, Assessment, Social Work

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Table of Contents

Abstract	v
Introduction	1
Literature Review	4
What Needs To Be Included	7
Literature Specific to Assessment Tools and Indigenous People	11
Cultural Appropriateness of Existing Assessment Tools	14
Theoretical Framework	18
Design and Methodology	21
Ethical Considerations	29
Findings	32
Findings from the Māori People	33
Findings from the First Nations ECE's in BC	41
Major Themes from Both	43
Relational Process	44
Inclusion of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Community	45
Inclusion of Culture and Spirituality	46
Inclusion of Oral Storytelling	48
Inclusion of Decolonization Process	50
Child Focused and Strengths Based	51
Conclusion	53
Applicability to Social Work	54
Appendix A: Tere Gilbert Support Letter	55

Appendix B: Dr. Lesley Rameka Support Letter	56
Appendix C: BCACCS Support Letter	57
Appendix D: Invitation Letter for Aotearoa/New Zealand	58
Appendix E: Invitation Letter for First Nations in BC	60
Appendix F: Aotearoa/NZ Sharing Circle Questions	61
Appendix G: First Nations in BC Sharing Circle Questions	62
Appendix H: Before/After Sharing Circle Outline	63
Appendix I: Before/After Interview Questions Outline	64
Appendix J: Participant Consent Form for Aotearoa/New Zealand	65
Appendix K: Participant Consent Form for First Nations in BC	69
Appendix L: Human Research Ethics Board Approval	73
Bibliography	74

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore the successes and challenges of using assessment tools with *First Nations* children in British Columbia (BC) and more importantly, to explore the feasibility of developing an assessment tool based upon a First Nation's worldview. Currently early childhood development programs, including First Nations programs, use screening and assessment tools based on Western society's worldview to review and assess Indigenous children's development. Assessments are used in early childhood programs for children ages 0 to 6 years to identify developmental delays or challenges that children may be experiencing. The BC Regional Innovation Chair for Aboriginal Early Childhood Development, McDonnell (2103) wrote, "Aboriginal ECEs [early childhood educators] have expressed concerns and raised questions about the cultural appropriateness of these tools when assessing the development of the First Nations/Aboriginal children in their programs" (p. 3). It is essential that First Nations children have access to supports and services that have been created within a First Nation's worldview (cite sources). For example, from a First Nation's worldview, a holistic perspective for overall health and wellbeing includes spirituality. In particular for Indigenous early childhood programs, a holistic view of child development is inclusive of supporting the interconnectedness of all domains of development: cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and spiritual (Mashon, 2010).

For clarity, throughout this research paper I have used the terms *Indigenous* and *Aboriginal* since similarities exist within their peoples' history and development in relation to Indigenous research experiences. In Canada, both terms Indigenous and Aboriginal are used when referring to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. The Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (2004) defines Indigenous peoples as:

Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system. (p. 2)

The term Indigenous is generally used within the international context (Simeone, 2013) to encompass the Aboriginal peoples throughout the world. Section 35 of the Constitution Act of Canada defines “Aboriginal peoples of Canada” as including “the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples” (Government of Canada, 1982).

Accordingly, Aboriginal Peoples is often used as an all-encompassing term that includes First Nations (Indians), Inuit and the Métis. Although the term “Indian” is seen as outdated, it has a specific legal definition under the *Indian Act*, and its use may be appropriate in certain circumstances. There are three categories of Indians: Status (or Registered) Indians, Non-Status Indians and Treaty Indians (Simeone, 2013).

Specifically for this research project the focus was on First Nations in BC, namely the Carrier Sekani Nation and N’lakapm’x Nation. While the term First Nations may have “no legal standing” (Simeone, 2013) within the colonial framework, it is used extensively throughout Canada by both non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples, communities and organizations. For the purposes of this research, it was decided to focus on First Nations in BC to ensure clarity and the ability to concentrate on one particular Indigenous group of people.

In addition, the Indigenous peoples from New Zealand, the Māori peoples, have shared

their wisdom and knowledge for this research project. The Māori people are the “indigenous [sic] person of Aotearoa/New Zealand” (Moorfield, 2016). As with Canadian Indigenous peoples, the Māori peoples include many different Nations or *iwis*.

I chose to capitalize all Indigenous groups to recognize the importance of Indigenous people and their rights for creating resources and tools based upon Indigenous worldviews. The *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People* reinforces those rights whereas, on November 12, 2010, “Canada reaffirm[ed] its commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of Indigenous peoples at home and abroad” (Government of Canada Indigenous and Northern Affairs, 2012).

As most Canadian assessment tools are based on Western society’s worldview, it made sense to explore the possibility of developing an assessment tool for First Nations Early Childhood Development community services that is respectful of First Nations’ worldviews and, therefore, culturally relevant, valid, and reliable. In reality, given the diversity of First Nations communities within BC, it may not be appropriate to create an assessment tool for First Nations child development.

Literature Review

Indigenous peoples have the skills, knowledge, and desire to conduct research for their own people using methodologies that are based on their worldviews. Historically, researchers have gone into communities and conducted research on Indigenous peoples that has negatively impacted them, disrespected them, and exploited their Indigenous knowledge (Assembly of First Nations Environmental Stewardship Unit [AFNESU], 2009; Kovach, 2009; Simmonds & Christopher, 2013; Smith, 2012). Disrespectful research practice and culturally inappropriate ethical standards shaped the way research was done and created a historical distrust of research in Indigenous communities (Campbell, 2014; Smith, 2012). These practices created a platform to discuss and address ethical considerations and to determine what needs to be included in the research process for the future.

Through research preparation and adequate time, a trusting relationship between researchers and Indigenous people can be created, which is a foundational component of research. Wilson (2008) shared, “Indigenous scholars are in the process of shaping, redefining and explaining their positions. They are defining the research, outlining the ethical protocols and explaining the culturally congruent methodologies” (p. 54). Natural laws, principles, codes of conduct, protocols, and Indigenous frameworks guide researchers through their research journey, along with the guidance of Elders and Knowledge Keepers (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Weber-Pillwax, 2004). The encouragement and support to conduct research utilizing Indigenous and First Nations’ worldviews was imperative in discovering the possibility of creating an assessment tool for early childhood development that is deemed valid, reliable, and culturally relevant by First Nations people and communities.

Disrespectful research practices have created a strained relationship between researchers and Indigenous people. The Assembly of First Nations Environmental Stewardship Unit (2009) validated that First Nations people have been harmed and a distrust of researchers has been created based on a lack of respect when research was conducted. First Nations people have been used as research subjects (AFNESU, 2009, p. 4) with a lack of culturally appropriate ethical standards practiced through the research process. Given the historical trauma that Indigenous people have experienced, Simmonds and Christopher (2013) stated that these experiences have “disempowered communities, imposed stereotypes that reinforced internalized racism” (p. 2185) and have created strenuous relationships between researchers and communities. This history “makes the positioning of an indigenous [sic] person as a researcher highly problematic” (Smith, 2012, p. 111). Researchers today must put in additional effort and build trust with Indigenous communities (Kovach, 2009; Weber-Pillwax, 2001) to ensure a secure working relationship is built between researcher and community.

Culturally inappropriate ethical standards contributed to disrespectful relationships between the researcher and Indigenous people. The Assembly of First Nations Environmental Stewardship Unit (2009) has advocated for changes based on the fact that “research has demonstrated a lack of understanding of and respect for communities’ cultural beliefs and has tended to misappropriate traditional knowledge” (p. 4). Indigenous people have been researched in many different forms, and as such, many ethical issues and concerns have been raised (AFNESU, 2009; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012). Today, Indigenous people have asserted their rights to conduct research of their own and have created tools to support ethical development and implementation of research. These tools include the *Ownership, Control, Access and Possession*:

The Path to First Nations Information Governance (The First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2014), which was created for First Nations in Canada, by First Nations, and

Is a set of principles that reflect First Nation commitments to use and share information in a way that bring benefit to the community while minimizing harm. Is it also an expression of First Nations jurisdiction over information about the First Nation. (p. 5)

These principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP) support the creation of a protocol agreement between the researcher and the community that includes how research will be conducted, who will be involved, who owns the research, who has access to the information collected, and how it will be disseminated. These principles are defined as follows:

Ownership: refers to the relationship of the First Nations community to its cultural knowledge / data / information The principle states that a community or group owns information collectively in the same way that an individual owns their personal information . . . *Control:* the aspirations and inherent rights of First Nations to maintain and regain control of all aspects of their lives and institutions extend to information and data. The principle of ‘control’ asserts that First Nations people, their communities and representative bodies must control how information about them is collected, used and disclosed. The element of control extends to all aspects of information management, from collection of data to the use, disclosure and ultimate destruction of data. *Access:* First Nations must have access to information and data about themselves and their communities, regardless of where it is held. The principle also refers to the right of First Nations communities and organizations to manage and make decisions regarding who can access their collective information. *Possession:* While ‘ownership’ identifies the relationship between a people and their data, possession reflects the state of stewardship

of data. First Nation possession puts data within First Nation jurisdiction and therefore, within First Nation control. (The First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2014, p. 5-6)

The OCAP principles are a resource for research development with First Nations in Canada. It is used for laying the foundation for building relationships when conducting research. Kovach (2009) promoted the use of protocols to hold the researcher accountable for protecting/respecting the sacredness of cultural knowledge. Overall, protocols strengthen the ethical foundation of research.

What Needs To Be Included

A strong, working relationship based on respect between researchers and communities is the core of culturally appropriate Indigenous research (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Weber-Pillwax, 2004; Wilson, 2008). Cultural values guide the essence of research in the following way:

Natural laws or principles of ethics are simply stated: kindness, caring, sharing, and respect. They are meant to govern our relationships with all other living beings and forms of life. A fifth that is sometimes added is service to community and others. (Weber-Pillwax, 2004, p. 80)

Similarly, the Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa/New Zealand, the Māori people have cultural terms that guide the way they conduct research from an Indigenous researcher perspective. These are inclusive of the following:

1. Aroha kit e tangata (a respect for people), 2. Kanohi kitea (the seen face, that is present yourself to people face to face), 3. Titiro, whakarongo . . . korero (look, listen . . . speak), 4. Manaaki kit e tangata (share and host people, be generous), 5. Kia tupato (be cautious),

6. Kaua e takahia te mana o te tangata (do not trample over the *mana* of people), 7. Kia mahaki (don't flaunt your knowledge). (Smith, 2012, p. 124)

These values influence interactions with communities, relationships as a collective with everyone and everything, and, most importantly, the way knowledge is shared within those communities. To build on this, the Māori have a research framework called *Kaupapa Māori* (What Works, 2015), which is informed by the above values. What Works (2015) wrote,

Kaupapa Māori research and evaluation is done by Māori, with Māori and for Māori. It is informed by tikanaga Māori, or Māori ways of doing things . . . They must build strong and healthy relationships with participants as they gather and analyse evidence . . . these relationships are built on mutual trust, respect, reciprocity and whanaungatanga. (para. 1–2)

Emphasis is placed on the importance of researchers approaching the work respectfully and building reciprocal relationships. Cora Weber-Pillwax (as cited in Wilson, 2008) notes that, “a researcher must make sure that the three R’s, Respect, Reciprocity and Relationality, are guiding the research” (p. 58). Along with respect, reciprocity is a foundational value when conducting research (Kovach, 2009). It is a give-and-take relationship that reflects the importance of balance to Indigenous worldviews by ensuring both parties are equally sharing and one is not taking more so than the other. For example, when one person shares information with another, to show respect and to honour them, the other would share knowledge in return. Smith (2012) believed that “to be able to share, to have something worth sharing, gives dignity to the giver. To accept a gift and to reciprocate gives dignity to the receiver” (p. 110).

Through education and awareness, a decolonization process takes place. Kovach (2010) advocated, “a decolonizing theoretical perspective is necessary within Indigenous research given the existing social inequities that Indigenous people continue to experience” (p. 42). The

decolonization process is an important component of a research project and is “a process which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels” (Smith, 2012, p. 21).

Decolonization is about centring our concerns and worldviews to know and critically understand theory, any underlying assumptions, motivations and values and how they may influence Indigenous knowledge and practice from our own perspective (Smith, 2012). By leading research processes with an Indigenous framework and building it upon Indigenous beliefs, movement towards a process that Graham Smith (as cited in Kovach, 2009) called “Indigenous praxis . . . The point is that Indigenous research needs to benefit Indigenous people in some way, shape or form” (p. 93). Through this process, learning happens and new knowledge is gained, which leads to transformation of beliefs (Kovach, 2009).

Utilizing a decolonizing lens not only promotes transformation, it is also effective for analyzing power differentials between the researcher and the community (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012). Through the community guiding the research project, providing input into what is being researched, supporting the development of the research, and supporting the compilation of the data and research findings will ensure that power remains with community (Smith, 2012). Critical reflexivity is used as a way for researchers to situate themselves, otherwise known as self-location, within the research and to analyze the power dynamics within the group (Kovach, 2009).

Indigenous worldviews have similarities, yet distinct differences that are based upon Indigenous ways of knowing (Kovach, 2005; Smith, 2012; Weber-Pillwax, 2004; Wilson, 2008). Wilson (2008) summarized one of the similarities as “all things are related and therefore relevant” (p. 58), which in turn means that each individual piece in life has meaning and there is a relationship with it. Indigenous knowledge is learned through life experience as an Indigenous

person and stems from worldview (Kovach, 2009). Kovach notes that, “Indigenous knowledges can never be standardized, for they are in relation to place and person. How they integrate into Indigenous research frameworks is largely researcher dependant” (p. 56). In other words, each individual Indigenous researcher will be guided by his or her own beliefs that have been self-learned through guidance and direction from his or her family and community

Indigenous knowledge, tribal epistemology, and the influence of culture are central to methodology within Indigenous research and make it distinct from Western research approaches (Kovach, 2009; Weber-Pillwax, 2004). Methodology is the establishment of how the research journey will be created and implemented. It is built on the collaboration of the researchers values and beliefs and “the parameters set by the ethics and principles of the culture in which s/he is engaged” (Weber-Pillwax, 2004, p. 88). Culture and spirituality may influence research with Indigenous people. For example, Sinclair (2003) captured this as “there are no guidelines telling the researcher when to incorporate ceremony, how and when to present offerings and gifts, how to honour ‘spirit’ or how to include these aspects into the writing piece of the research” (p. 121). Ceremonies that may take place include prayers, welcoming of participants, closing of the process, an offering of tobacco or gifting to the participants or community, or a calling upon the ancestors to provide guidance during the journey (Kovach, 2009). The inclusion of ceremony, prayer, and protocols would be conducted in the proper way, in which “proper refers to respecting, honouring, and attending to the spiritual and cultural practices and protocols” (Sinclair, 2003, p. 121).

Preparing for research is a large component of the research journey. Researcher preparation is a process of making arrangements, consulting Elders and Knowledge Keepers for guidance, and conducting ceremonies to be clear of the academic and personal motivations for

the research (Kovach, 2009). Through research preparation, “inward reflection of the researcher” (Kovach, 2009, p. 49) is imperative and dependent upon the individual researcher.

Data collection for Indigenous researchers may take place using a variety of mixed methodologies in the form of sharing circles, conversational methods, and storytelling (Kovach, 2010; Lavallée, 2009; Sam, 2011; Weber-Pillwax, 2004). Through these forms of data collection, mixed methodology provides the opportunity to have guiding questions for the discussion’ yet the fluidity for the sharing to move into another direction if needed (Kovach, 2009). Each of these honour a relational process, orality as a means of transmitting knowledge, and reciprocity (Kovach, 2010).

Literature Specific to Assessment Tools and Indigenous People

Early childhood educators (ECEs) in BC have created resources that provide guidance on what a quality IECD program would include or would be foundational for their program (BCACCS, 2011). The promotion of quality within all areas of an IECD program and service delivery is essential for ensuring children and families receive excellent supports and services. Specific to Indigenous ECEs, Mashon (2010) identified the following five values, as critical to Indigenous approaches to early childhood education and care:

- **Indigenous Knowledge/Ways of Being:** Indigenous early childhood programs foster Indigenous ways of being by employing Indigenous personnel, promote intergenerational transfer of Indigenous knowledge through Elders, and include traditional teachings as part of culturally-based curriculum materials.
- **Self-Determination:** Indigenous early childhood programs ensure Indigenous governance/authority over program development and service delivery.

- **Holistic View of Child Development:** Indigenous early childhood programs support the interconnectedness of all domains of development (cognitive, social–emotional, physical, and spiritual) and particularly attend to Indigenous children’s spiritual development needs.
- **Family and Community Involvement:** Indigenous early childhood programs adopt a community-based philosophy of parental involvement, and engage extended family and community members in program delivery and decision making.
- **Aboriginal Languages:** Indigenous early childhood programs recognize Indigenous language as holding the intricacies of Indigenous ways of being and thus include Indigenous language to the extent possible. (pp. 38–39)

While these approaches are being applied to early Indigenous childhood education, they have yet to be applied to assessment tools. These foundational values would be a significant guide for developing and implementing assessment tools for First Nations children in BC.

Indigenous people have a holistic view of child development, one that includes recognizing the interconnectedness of their physical, emotional, cognitive/intellectual, and spiritual health and wellbeing (BCACCS, 2011; Rother, 2015; Walker, 2008). Each area of development influences the other, and assessment tools are a way to determine if there is an imbalance for the child and ways to provide support to create balance (BCACCS, 2011). Current assessment tools are inadequate in their ability to capture an Indigenous child’s wellbeing and development based upon this Indigenous holistic worldview.

For example, Indigenous children having a sense of self is a vital component of life and this sense of self includes ancestry and spirituality. As described by Rameka (2011):

It is crucial that Māori children develop a strong and secure sense of identity that emphasizes their connectedness to their ancestors, the universe and everything in it, and the spirit world. Assessment by and for Māori must support the development of a strong Māori identity in children, through reflecting Māori perspectives of the child, his/her world, and his/her place in the world. (p. 254)

While current assessment tools can support the developmental process for Indigenous children, they must also be inclusive of Indigenous worldviews and ensure the spiritual and cultural identity of the Indigenous child, family, and community, which are vital components of one's worldview (BCACCS, 2011).

Supportive strategies from a holistic perspective that were identified to use when implementing screening and assessment tools for Aboriginal children include the following:

- involving parents both to gain consent and throughout screening, monitoring, and follow-up;
- ensuring that programs respect the parent's level of readiness to proceed with formal screening and assessment;
- screening and assessment processes are undertaken in a comfortable and familiar environment such as home or child care;
- good communication between all involved: parents, AECD [Aboriginal early childhood development] practitioners, other professionals through the assessment process;
- having the resources to follow up with specialists, therapists, etc. as needed.

Resources including funding for transportation, accommodation (if needed), child care (as required) and psychological support; and

- using “culturally appropriate practice [such as] respecting parents, listening to parents, working to build a positive relationship [sic] with parents, and only introducing formal observations, screening, or assessments when the parents are ready and signal agreement through explicit consent. (Ball, 2007, p. 4)

These recommendations provide guidance for ECEs when using current screening and assessment tools that presently place Aboriginal children into categories of development based upon Western worldviews (BCACCS, 2011). They could also provide guidance and direction for areas to consider in the developmental process of an assessment tool for First Nations children in BC.

Cultural Appropriateness of Existing Assessment Tools

Early Childhood Educators, families, caregivers, and professionals identified concerns when Western screening or assessment tools were used for Indigenous children. These concerns included a focus on (a) child deficits, (b) lack of communication with other professionals, (c) cognitive development rather than taking a holistic approach, (d) approaches that did not take into account the opportunities of experiential or traditional learning, and (e) the reality that learning opportunities and resources are limited for Aboriginal children in comparison to non-Aboriginal children was not taken into consideration (McDonnell, 2013). Culture influences every aspect of overall health and wellness for all children, however this is especially true for Indigenous children. Culture, whether it’s acknowledged or not will influence the outcomes of an Indigenous child’s screening or assessment (McDonnell, 2013).

Nikipota (as cited in McDonnell, 2013) stressed that the cultural perspective of the family with whom and community within which the child lives is essential to understanding information

collected in the assessment process. Nikipota provided some examples of how culture influences the way families may perceive behaviours:

- different attitudes about parenting and child-rearing such as sleeping arrangements, dependence and independence, and autonomy;
- different ideas about intelligence and language development;
- different ideas about appropriate roles of family members and concepts such as duty and obligation;
- different concepts of the relationship between parent and child and how that relationship changes as children grow and develop; and
- different attitudes about the importance of a child's relationship with his/her peers (p. 14).

In order to ensure cultural sensitivity, people conducting assessments with Indigenous children must take these factors into consideration and the ways in which they influence the child's growth and development. Involvement of the family, extended family, and community will alleviate questions or clarify needed about areas that are deemed important for assessment.

Screening and assessment tools have been adapted or modified to better suit the Indigenous people using them (Rother, 2015). For example, the Kahnawake Nation and Syilx Nation have both culturally adapted the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, which is a screening tool for child development. Both Nations identified the need to adapt the tool for the following reasons:

In the past we depended largely on an outside perspective, one that did not acknowledge or appreciate our culture and the way our community thought about child development.

As a result children were labeled with disorders and thought to be deficient or delayed.

(Rother, 2015, p. 4)

The Kahnawake and Syilx Nations recognized the need “to develop tools and programs that reflect the unique culture and linguistics richness” (Rother, 2015, p. 2) of Aboriginal people. Current screening or assessment tools, may meet some areas of developmental screening for Indigenous children. However, the concern is that, while the Ages and Stages Questionnaire includes physical, social, emotional, and cognitive areas of development, it does not include spiritual development (McDonnell, 2013).

In collaboration with the Ministry of Education in New Zealand, the Māori people have created a bicultural early childhood curriculum called *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mo ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa/Early Childhood Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1996). It is a bicultural socio-culturally curriculum and is described as follows:

Te Whāriki is the Ministry of Education’s early childhood curriculum policy statement. It is a framework for providing tamariki (children’s) early learning and development within a sociocultural context. It emphasises the learning partnership between kaiako (teachers), parents, and whānau/families. Kaiako (teachers) weave an holistic curriculum in response to tamariki (children’s) learning and development in the early childhood setting and the wider context of the child’s world. (para. 3)

The development of Te Whāriki led to the development of “exploring new ways to assess young children’s learning and development” (Rameka, 2011, p. 245). An assessment tool called *Te Whatu Pōkeka* (Walker & Walker, 2009) was developed in partnership with Māori ECEs, communities, and families. Te Whatu Pōkeka was created to ensure the following:

Child development assessment tools that are grounded in Māori understandings, worldviews, philosophies and practices can support the development of a secure Māori identity and thus a positive future for Māori children. Assessment for Māori therefore must reflect and support being Māori. (Rameka, 2011, p. 247)

Given the findings and recommendations of the Māori Assessment tools that have been created using the Kaupapa Māori framework, it makes sense to research and learn from the developmental journey that the Māori experienced. As the Māori have gone through the developmental phase of creating an assessment tool that is based upon Māori worldview (Rameka, 2011) and inclusive of cultural relevancy, safety, and validity, much learning can come from the process that they have already undertaken.

Currently in Canada, a child development assessment tool based on Indigenous worldviews has not been created. The opportunity to research the relational and developmental process of the Māori people will build a stronger case for the need to develop an Indigenous assessment tool in Canada.

Theoretical Framework

In order to understand the anti-colonial theoretical foundation for this research, first the history of the relationship between Indigenous peoples and theory must be understood. As it is largely due to this relationship that anticolonial strategies and theory now guide how research is conducted with Aboriginal people (Assembly of First Nations, 2009). Given this history, an anti-oppressive approach will foster Indigenous empowerment and create a holistic approach for research with Indigenous people, which is created and directed by Indigenous worldview.

Colonialism and post-colonial theory have suppressed the ability of Indigenous peoples to create programming, resources or services and conduct research that is built upon Indigenous worldviews. Through using an anti-colonial theoretical framework, Indigenous researchers are moving away from the colonial system. The historical treatment of Indigenous peoples and research, along with theory as part of colonialism must be acknowledged. As stated by Smith (1999):

Indigenous peoples have been, in many ways, oppressed by theory. Any consideration of the ways our origins have been examined, our histories recounted, our arts analysed, our cultures dissected, measured, torn apart and distorted back to us will suggest that theories have not looked sympathetically or ethically at us. (p. 38)

It is essential for researchers to know the history of research and “the negative impacts for Indigenous people” (Assembly of First Nations, 2009; G. H. Smith, 2002; Smith, 2012) that still exist today. Graham Smith (2002) wrote, “I do not believe for an instant that we are in a postcolonial period. I do not think we have seen the last of colonization; on the contrary, it is very much alive and well” (p. 215). Based on this negative history, researchers today must use

extra precaution when initiating research projects and implementing them with Indigenous people.

Colonialism exists today and has been “reformed in different and more subtle ways” (Smith, 2002, p. 215), such as the mandating of programs or services that do not work well for Indigenous people. Wehbi (2011) described anti-colonialism as a “term [that] acknowledges the continued struggle against new forms of colonialism (neocolonialism)” (p. 134). Indigenous people continually need to take a stand against colonialism and advocate for frameworks, policies, and services that are built upon our own beliefs. Anticolonial theoretical frameworks, “stands as a holistic framework, takes into account previous and continued colonial relations, and centers Indigenous knowledges as the epistemological foundation of research that occurs within all areas of continued colonization” (Lewis, 2012, p. 232).

An anti-oppressive approach with an anticolonial theoretical framework will support the development of a research project that is built upon Indigenous values and beliefs. The anti-oppressive approach will involve a “process of integrating cultural knowledge, drawing on practices that exist within customs, traditions, and language of Indigenous peoples. This understanding may also include explorations of the history of the particular Indigenous group with whom you are working” (Freeman, 2011, p. 116). Involvement and support from the Indigenous participants and communities for this research is imperative in maintaining an anti-oppressive approach. Community involvement and support are also key factors in upholding ethical research built upon an anti-colonialist theory.

Research is a form of sharing wisdom and knowledge. Smith (1999) captured the importance of this when she wrote, “sharing knowledge is also a long-term commitment” (p. 16) and the “old colonial adage that knowledge is power is taken seriously in Indigenous

communities” (p. 16). Research supports Indigenous empowerment by providing Indigenous people the opportunity to create and implement their own research agendas, either on their own or in partnership with others. Smith (1999) described Indigenous research as: “[t]hemes such as cultural survival, self-determination, healing, restoration and social justice are engaging Indigenous researchers and Indigenous communities in a diverse array of projects” (p. 142). Research is an opportunity to bring forth traditional values, beliefs, ways of being, and knowledge that can be utilized to build Indigenous programs and services for the betterment of their communities.

The combined foundation of an anticolonial theoretical framework, with an anti-oppressive approach, ensures a strong foundation to conduct research in an ethical way with Indigenous peoples. The purpose of this research is to learn from Indigenous peoples about the relational process of developing or creating an assessment process.

Design and Methodology

This research project has been a learning journey of establishing an Indigenous inquiry based on *Nle?kepmx* values and beliefs and utilizing Kovach's (2009) mixed methodology and conversational method. As an Indigenous person conducting research with Indigenous people, the Indigenous inquiry was grounded in a relationship-based approach (Kovach, 2009) and honoured the voices of all participants. The aims of this research were to review and learn from existing Indigenous assessment tools and to have dialogue and conversations with other Indigenous people and First Nations ECEs to explore the possibility of creating a First Nations-based assessment tool in BC.

As an Indigenous person, Indigenous knowledge is acquired throughout daily life. Kovach (2009) articulated, "[i]t is pertinent to note that Indigenous knowledges can never be standardized, for they are in relation to place and person. How they integrate into Indigenous research frameworks is largely researcher dependent" (p. 56). Indigenous knowledge includes epistemology as "it involves the theory of how we come to have knowledge, or how we know that we know something" (Wilson, 2008, p. 33). Indigenous knowledge provided guidance throughout this journey of learning by contributing to greater understanding about assessments for First Nations children. Kovach continued, "[d]escriptive words associated with Indigenous epistemologies include interactional and interrelational, broad-based, whole, inclusive, animate, cyclical, fluid, and spiritual. Tribal knowledge is pragmatic and ceremonial, physical and metaphysical" (p. 56). This methodology is built upon Indigenous epistemology.

A foundational value for this research is respect: respectful relationships respectful dialogue, and respectful conduct. Smith (2012) wrote, "the term 'respect' is consistently used by Indigenous peoples to underscore the significance of our relationships and humanity . . . Respect

is reciprocal, shared, constantly interchanging principle which is expressed through all aspects of social conduct” (p. 125). With respect comes reciprocity, which is a means to give back to the community through the research. According to Kovach (2009), “A relational research approach is built upon the collective value of giving back to the community” (p. 149); through the relational approach, meaningful dialogue is created with the community. Relational research is also concerned with doing research in a good way and is imperative to creating a foundation built on trust between the researcher and participants (Kovach, 2009).

For clarity and purpose, this research has focused on First Nations in BC, including the Carrier Sekani Nation and N’lakapm’x Nation. The purpose of this research was to delve deeper into the possibility of developing an assessment tool for First Nations Early Childhood Development community services that are respectful of First Nations worldview and therefore culturally relevant, valid, and reliable. The following question was explored: Given the diversity of First Nations communities within BC, would it be realistic and desirable to create an assessment tool for First Nations child development?

The desire to conduct this research was based upon my previous work with Aboriginal early childhood development (AECD) programs. AECD programs are inclusive of daycares, preschools, Head Start programs, and after school care programs for children ages 0 to 6 years old. Screening and assessment tools are used to review and assess a child’s development. The BC Regional Innovation Chair in Aboriginal Early Childhood Development, McDonnell stated:

Typically, these assessments are used to identify developmental challenges children experience in early learning environments. Aboriginal ECEs [early childhood educators] have expressed concerns and raised questions about the cultural appropriateness of these

tools when assessing the development of the First Nations/Aboriginal children in their programs. (McDonnell, 2013, p. 3)

Currently AECD programs, including First Nations programs, use screening and assessment tools that are built upon Western concepts of early childhood development. From a First Nations worldview, a holistic perspective for overall health and wellbeing includes spirituality. Mashon (2010) and the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society stated,

Critical to Indigenous approaches to early childhood education and care [is a] Holistic View of Child Development: Indigenous early childhood programs support the interconnectedness of all domains of development (cognitive, social-emotional, physical and spiritual) and particularly attend to Indigenous children's spiritual development needs. (p. 39)

To ensure optimal child development, screening or assessment tools need to include spirituality as an area of development (Mashon, 2010; McDonnell, 2013). Kipuri (2009) views spirituality as a relationship that human beings create with the spirit world that is intimately linked to the environment in which we live. Spirituality differs from religion in the sense that it is based upon relationships and an internal connection to all within the universe, whereas religion could be defined as a specific practice or ritual (Kipuri, 2009). Given Canada's colonial history in relation to Indigenous peoples, it is important that Indigenous spirituality be distinguished from religion and that this separation be respected. This research is focused exclusively on Indigenous spirituality and its relation to the holistic wellbeing of Indigenous children.

Two processes will be involved in collecting information for this research. According to Smith (2012) "[p]rocesses are expected to be respectful, to enable people to heal and to educate. They are expected to lead one small step further towards self-determination" (p. 130). Therefore,

the first process will include gathering feedback and information from First Nations ECEs in BC on the need for an assessment tool that is based upon First Nations worldview and will provide guidance on the way the tool would be created. The second process of the research will be with the Māori people of Aotearoa/New Zealand to gather feedback and data on the developmental process for creating and providing assessments for Māori children that is based upon Māori values and beliefs.

I connected with a Māori colleague, Tere Gilbert and requested her support in sharing this research opportunity with her colleagues (see Appendix A). Tere linked me to Dr. Lesley Rameka, one of the writers of the Māori assessment process called Te Whatu Pōkeka. Dr. Rameka agreed to support this research and provided me with a support letter to submit with my Human Research Ethics Proposal Application (see Appendix B). The information and knowledge gathered from the Māori will provide guidance and direction for implementing a process with First Nations ECEs in BC.

Next, I shared my research topic with the British Columbia Aboriginal Child Care Society (BCACCS), as they “conduct research and support Aboriginal Early Childhood Educators in BC” (BCACCS, 2013). They offered a support letter and support from their staff in creating invitation letters to the Māori participants and the First Nations in BC (see Appendices C, D, and E). The BCACCS staff also provided support in the form of reviewing all documents pertaining to the focus group sessions including the sharing circle questions, the sharing circle preparation outline, and the interview preparation outline (see Appendices F, G, H, and I). BCACCS also provided support and review of the Māori participant consent forms and the First Nations participants consent forms (see Appendices J and K). Once all of these items were completed, the Human Research Ethics Application was given final approval on May 6, 2015

(see Appendix L); planning and recruitment commenced for the Māori participants and then for the First Nations participants.

The decision to connect and learn from the Māori was made based on the information learned from Dr. Lesley Rameka's (2012) research on the *Kaupapa Māori* approach to child assessment. The motivation to create an assessment tool for First Nations children in BC and the creation of Te Whatu Pōkeka: Kaupapa Māori Learning and Assessment Exemplar tool had similarities. Rameka (2012) wrote:

Through the exploration of Kaupapa Māori assessment approaches, I examine the reclaiming and reframing of Māori ways of knowing and being within early childhood practice. Assessment is the vehicle for reclaiming and reframing while Kaupapa Māori theory is the fuel that ignites and drives the vehicle. (p. 3)

Given that the Kaupapa Māori assessment tool was created by Māori people and was being used within early childhood development programs, it was imperative to learn from their experience for this research project.

When conducting research with Indigenous people, it is important to locate or situate self within research (Absolon, 2009; Kovach, 2009). By locating myself within the research, I am building trust with the people with whom I am working. Absolon and Willett (2005) believed, "[t]he actual research is in the research process, which cannot take place without the trust of the community, and one way to gain trust is to locate yourself" (p. 107). My *ski?kiye?* or my ancestors are *Scw'éxmx*, people of the creeks, and *Stó:lō*; people of the river. I am an *Nl̓eʔkepmx* (Interior Salish) and *Stó:lō* (Coast Salish) woman, mother, sister, aunty, daughter, and friend to many. Within my community, I am known as a *cwám*, otherwise known as a worker or a helper.

Elders and Knowledge Keepers provided guidance and direction for the research project and they have been my mentors and educators for learning and living the Nleʔkepmx ways. Smith (2012) wrote that, “it is common practice in many indigenous [sic] contexts for elders to be approached as the first point of contact, and as the long-term mentor of an indigenous researcher” (p. 138). The Elders and Knowledge Keepers have been pivotal in supporting this research with guidance, ceremonies, prayers, and cultural knowledge that then guided me and ensured I was conducting my research in an ethical way. Kovach (2009) stated, “researchers incorporate ceremonial practices to show respect and give protection to the knowledge shared” (p. 116). I incorporated cultural practices by attending ceremonies with Elders and Knowledge Keepers prior to conducting research, both with First Nations and Māori; offering prayers for clarity and guidance during the research journey; hand drumming songs and prayers for participants; and presenting research participants a handmade gift in return for the sharing of their knowledge to manifest reciprocity. Cultural protocols, “which [are] a set of guidelines for interacting with those holders of knowledge” (Kovach, 2009, p. 127), are dependant upon each individual Indigenous group. To ensure cultural protocols were abided by when visiting other Indigenous groups or territories; I contacted people from that group prior to entering the territory to learn of the protocols.

Consistent self-reflection, otherwise known as “reflexivity[,] is a central component of the research process” (Kovach, 2009, p. 33). Reflexivity included locating myself within the research on a consistent basis; checking in with myself to ensure clarity of the research question; reviewing the questions and responses for assurance on the direction of the research; and reflecting on personal beliefs and impacts on the research. Kovach (2009) described, “[c]ritically reflective self-location is a strategy to keep us aware of the power dynamics flowing back and

forth between researcher and participants” (p. 112). Self-reflection provided an opportunity to understand and address any power differences that may arise and increases the ability to empower participants. Each sharing circle and conversation was conducted in a respectful manner between researcher and participant. A safe space to share was created through the following of cultural protocols, offering prayers and song, and consistent check in with participants; no power differences were noted during the research process.

This research was an Indigenous inquiry and used a mixed methodology approach (Kovach, 2009). Teachings from my Elders were also used and included, “taking the time to sit down and talk with one another; share food; share stories and information; through giving and receiving of knowledge” (A. Washington, personal communication, October 1, 2015). The methods used to gather the information from participants were through sharing circles, conversations and storytelling (Kovach, 2010). Lavallée (2009) wrote, “sharing circles are used to capture people’s experiences . . . How they differ from focus groups is the sacred meaning they have in many indigenous [sic] cultures and in the growth and transformation bases for the participants” (p. 28). There is meaning in every discussion and conversation with the individuals who crossed my path and through this journey of research. For example, the Elders and Knowledge Keepers who provided guidance and direction for this research gathered in sharing circles to offer their direction, suggestions, and recommendations. Each sharing circle began with a prayer to offer thanks for bringing everyone together to share each others experiences and learn from one another.

Conversations were used to gather information from all participants. Kovach (2009) described the conversational method as “an open-ended structure that is flexible enough to accommodate principles of native oral traditions . . . shows respect for the participant’s story and

allows research participants greater control over what they wish to share with respect to the research question” (pp. 123–124). A list of guiding questions with probes allowed for rich discussion and the opportunity to lead into other areas that may be relevant to the research.

As the prime researcher, I was responsible for all data collection, compilation, and information sharing. Along with personal notes, a digital recorder was used to capture all discussion during the sharing circles, conversations, and storytelling. Maintaining confidentiality is an ethical consideration (Kovach, 2009; Thomas, 2005) and maintaining the confidentiality and upholding respect of the shared knowledge was of the utmost importance to ensure the relationship was honoured. Kovach (2009) added, “once individuals have agreed to share their story, the researcher’s responsibility is to ensure voice and representation” (p. 99).

Taking the time to establish trust to create relationships with each participant is imperative to the sharing of stories. For Indigenous people, storytelling is a way to pass on teachings, share knowledge, and history (Archibald, 2007; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Thomas, 2005). The Māori participants were willing to share their experiences and stories about their relational and developmental processes in creating an assessment tool that was based on their values and beliefs. The First Nations ECEs in BC were given the space and time to share their stories of their work with First Nations children and discuss the need to create a First Nations assessment tool for children in BC that is based on a First Nations’ worldview.

The sample of the groups was a selection of ECEs from New Zealand and BC who have knowledge of and experience in working with Indigenous children; experience using assessment tools and the interest to create resources and tools that are reflective of Indigenous values and beliefs. The first group of participants was made up of representatives of the Māori people who participated in the development of the assessment process called *Te Whatu Pōkeka* (Education &

Rameka, 2009), including Dr. Rameka and the initial pilot project participants. This selection process was steered by, “having a pre-existing and ongoing relationships with the research participants” (Kovach, 2009, p. 51). My connection was through an early child development colleague named Tere Gilbert, who is Māori and was a participant in the development of Te Whatu Pōkeka. Given our previous work together, we had a well-established and trusting relationship that supported this research within the Māori community.

A second selection process was with First Nations ECEs in BC to gain feedback on the interest and feasibility to develop an assessment process for First Nations children in BC. The participants who were selected for this research had previous knowledge and experience of working with First Nations children and using assessment tools to assess their child development (Dudley, 2016). They are known as experts in the field of Indigenous early childhood development within First Nations communities and were ideal candidates to participate in this research. After each presentation, honouring of all participants for sharing their wisdom and knowledge occurs to ensure reciprocity between the researcher and participants.

Sharing this research and the findings by way of reporting back to the people who initially shared, is an important component of disseminating knowledge (Smith, 2012). Presentations to the Māori and First Nations communities that participated are being scheduled to ensure the information is shared appropriately.

Ethical Considerations

This research was given approval by the University of the Fraser Valley Human Research Ethics Board in May, 2015. This research is guided by the Assembly of First Nations Environmental Stewardship Units’ *Ethics in First Nations Research* (Assembly of First Nations, 2009) document; The *OCAP: Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession* (First Nations Centre,

2007) principles of “Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP) [which] enable self-determination over all research concerning First Nations” (p. 1); and the *University of the Fraser Valley Research Ethics Policy #54 – Synopsis* (Valley, 2014, p. 27). Listed below are areas for ethical consideration that are included in this research:

- conducting research and following proper cultural protocols based on the Indigenous peoples with which I am working;
- taking the appropriate time to build a relationship from the beginning of the research in order to create a strong partnership with the Indigenous groups that is built upon trust;
- respecting and honouring values and beliefs of each Indigenous group, including showing respect for the traditional territory on which we are conducting business;
- having informed consent and voluntary participation of all participants and sharing information and intentions of the sharing circles and conversations prior to meeting in the community;
- discussing, reviewing, and signing participant permission forms once there;
- maintaining privacy and confidentiality;
- ensuring clarity around intellectual property rights and creating an agreement about how the findings and final report will be distributed;
- valuing time and effort of participants as they are the experts and Knowledge Keepers of this topic; appreciating and honouring participants’ time and sharing of knowledge and gifting them with an offering to show appreciation; and
- reimbursing travel expenses if needed to attend and hosting a lunch or dinner to show appreciation for all participants.

Some of the limitations associated with these ethical considerations were the travel that was required to share stories in person; the amount of time required to create a strong working relationship; and the building of trust required to conduct research in an ethical way with Indigenous peoples. Having a strong foundational working relationship was highly valuable throughout the entire research process. According to Kovach (2009), “for story to surface, there must be trust. Given the egregious past research practices in Indigenous communities, earning trust is critical and may take time” (p. 98). Trust will nourish the storytelling and sharing; and sustain the research process.

Findings

The participants included Indigenous people who work within the early childhood education field, including Māori from Aotearoa and First Nations from BC. Aotearoa, “is commonly given as the name for New Zealand” (Māori Language Information, 2013). In total, 19 people from both Indigenous Nations participated. Nine participants were from Aotearoa and ten participants were from various First Nations located in BC. The Māori participants were made up of one Elder, a researcher and instructor for ECEs, and an ECE researcher and manager of a daycare programs; the remaining six were ECEs that currently work in daycares, preschools, or other ECE programs with Māori children. Of the Māori participants that currently work in ECE programs, three worked in an elementary school setting, and five worked in a daycare setting.

The First Nations ECE’s from BC that participated were from the Carrier Sekani Nation and the N’lakapm’x Nation. They were made up of an ECE researcher one ECE instructor, and the remaining eight were ECEs who work within ECE programs with First Nations children. Of the First Nations participants who currently work in ECE programs, five worked in a daycare and two worked in preschools. All participants had some form of postsecondary education inclusive of Early Childhood Education certificates, diplomas, degrees, doctorates, and specialized training to implement child development assessment tools for children with extra needs. The combined experience for all participants brought forth extensive wisdom and knowledge within the ECE area, as the minimum work experience for all participants was five years with the maximum surpassing 25 years.

I will first review the findings from the sharing circles and interviews with the Māori people on their developmental process in creating *Te Whatu Pōkeka: Kaupapa Māori Assessment*

and Learning Exemplars, a child development assessment tool (Ministry of Education & Rameka, 2009). Next I will review the findings from the research discussions with the First Nations ECEs in BC.

Throughout this section, I use direct quotes and discussion points from the Māori and the First Nations ECE sharing circles and conversations. To clearly identify direct quotes from the Māori participants and to maintain confidentiality quotes are referenced as Māori participant (MP) with a number one through ten that corresponds to each participant. To acknowledge group discussion through the Māori sharing circles, summarized information is referenced as MSC. To recognize direct quotes from the First Nations participants, quotes will be referenced as First Nations participant (FNP) with a number in relation to the participant. To acknowledge group discussion through the First Nations sharing circles, summarized information is referenced as FNSC.

Findings from the Māori People

In this section, I will review Te Whatu Pōkeka and the way that it has been implemented; I share my understanding and interpretation of the project framework, outlining each developmental stage. This interpretation includes a timeline and the successes and challenges that the Māori experienced throughout the developmental and implementation process in creating Te Whatu Pōkeka. Lastly, the Māori have provided recommendations and advice from their journey with Te Whatu Pōkeka that will provide guidance for the future journey of creating an assessment tool for First Nations children in.

The Māori participants welcomed the possibility to share their developmental process of Te Whatu Pōkeka. The participants consisted of ECEs who were a part of the developmental process by being one of the five pilot projects that guided Te Whatu Pōkeka or they are currently

using the tool for Māori child assessment. This Māori assessment tool was developed based on the “need to do more for supporting Māori children that are based on Māori worldview” (MP9). Pre-existing bicultural assessment tools were created and being used for assessing Māori children. These bicultural assessment tools were developed by a combination non-Indigenous people and Indigenous people and developed using bicultural beliefs, which are beliefs inclusive of Western and Māori concepts, and a combination of worldviews (Ministry of Education, 1996). For example listed below is Te Whāriki which is a bicultural curriculum tool that was developed in 1996:

Te Whāriki is the Ministry of Education’s early childhood curriculum policy statement. It is a framework for providing tamariki (children’s) early learning and development within a sociocultural context. It emphasises the learning partnership between kaiako (teachers), parents, and whānau/families. Kaiako (teachers) weave an holistic curriculum in response to tamariki (children’s) learning and development in the early childhood setting and the wider context of the child’s world. (Ministry of Education, 1996)

Given that Te Whāriki is a bicultural curriculum, it has led to the development of a Māori developed child development assessment tool that is built upon “traditional Māori worldview of the child” (MP9). The assessment tool that was created is called Te Whatu Pōkeka, which is the tool and process being researched for this project.

The group that collaborated to develop Te Whatu Pōkeka was made up of ECE researchers, ECE experts, a Māori Elder, otherwise known as *Kaumātua*, and five ECE programs and their staff who worked directly with Māori children and communities. The five ECE programs involved their tribes or *Iwi*, communities, parents, caregivers, and *Kaumātua*, in

determining their individual assessment frameworks. In collaboration, the group decided to call the project Te Whatu Pōkeka, which is described as follows:

The weaving of a traditional baby wrap made of softened muka (fibre) from the harakeke (flax) plant. The tight and intricate weaving of these strands strengthens the outer layer of the wrap to shelter the baby from the elements. Carefully woven into the inside of the baby wrap were very fine feathers taken from the inside of the albatross wings, to provide warmth, comfort, security and refuge. This as a metaphor identifies a place of protection, warmth and safety, a place in which the baby will grow and develop. Therefore the Pōkeka takes the shape of the child as it learns and grows therefore, within the context of this project; the assessment is determined and sharpened by the child. (Walker, 2008)

Te Whatu Pōkeka was developed to be holistic and fluid, to grow with the child, and to keep the child at the centre of all assessment (Rameka, 2011). The Māori participants shared, “The Pōkeka itself told us how the child was growing; for example, when you started seeing feet and hands coming out, then you knew it was time for the child to move onto the next stage” (MP9), and “No stages ever confined the child, or limited the child, because it was the child that defined who they are” (MP9). This analogy created the space to ensure that ECEs or caregivers and centres needed to look at who the child was, what was important for the child, and what was valued learning (MSC).

Throughout the developmental process, spirituality influenced the direction the process would go. The Māori participants recognized that this work needed to be done and that, if this was meant to happen, then the participants would trust that it would happen (MSC). One of the foundational components of the developmental process was “to uphold everyone’s Mana . . . which is an important aspect of anything to do with researching Māori, ensuring that at no stage

is anyone to be seen in a negative way” (MSC). Mana is the power and potential of each individual and it was described as being of the utmost importance to ensure that each individual was empowered to contribute to the project in a safe environment (Walker, 2008).

The Māori participants who supported the development of the framework of Te Whatu Pōkeka took great care to ensure that it was built upon Māori perspective as it was not meant to represent any specific tribe or group (MSC). The entire project took place over a three-year timeframe. Year one focused on decolonizing the Western model of early childhood development. Māori participants shared that much of this year was spent discussing and analyzing how they had been trained to work with children based upon a Western worldview (MSC). Year two focused on reclaiming ideas, reframing thinking, and recentring ideas on valued learning for Māori children (MP9). During this phase, staff from the programs that were involved in the project started to build their own frameworks for assessment based on their Māori values and beliefs for their particular Iwi. These frameworks were based upon the following (MP9):

What each program valued, what they wanted, what the inspirations were for their children, what they valued as knowledge, what knowledge they valued, as well as what and how they thought teaching should happen for Māori children. All of these programs went back to what is important to bring back from the past to bring forward, what are our important concepts, what are our important ideals.

During year three one framework for Te Whatu Pōkeka was developed. It was based upon a combination of the frameworks that were developed by the five pilot project programs.

Participants shared that a great amount of time was spent decolonizing the thought processes and views about Western society’s beliefs on early childhood development and

determining which Māori beliefs guided their children's development. Part of the thought process was as follows:

Reclaiming our traditions, and our history . . . we recognized that it could not just be reclaimed because we are in a different context. Some of the practices that our old people used to practice could not be transferred as a contemporary childhood belief . . . We could look at why did they do it that way, the rational, the theory, and then bring that in and do it in a different way (MSC).

In essence, the Māori participants were critiquing and analyzing “valued learning or what is valued, what do we value, what are the learnings we value” (MP9). For example, one of the programs chose to use the Polynesian hero Māui (Westervelt, 1910) as a basis for a characteristic that they would like for their children. Māui was an ideal person, he was a demigod and his behaviours were templates for ideal children's behaviours (MP9). The participants felt that these stories and legends were inspirations they had for their children, and the stories and legends are just as valid today as when Māori were roaming the Pacific (MSC).

Through the developmental process, overarching goals were created for Te Whatu Pōkeka. These goals provided clear direction of what assessment means from a Māori perspective and are listed below:

- Assessment is about children's learning within a Māori learning context. Assessment implies that there are aims or goals for children's learning.
- Assessment is based on our ways of seeing and knowing the world and on our ways of being and interacting in the world.
- Assessment involves making visible learning that is valued within te ao Māori; “Te Ao Māori denotes *‘the Māori World’*. While simple in definition, it is rich in meaning

and vast in breadth and depth. Here, Te Ao Māori refers to three key areas, including Te Reo Māori (*Māori language*), tikanga Māori (*protocols and customs*) and Te Tiriti o Waitangi (*the Treaty of Waitangi*)” (University of Otago, 2010).

- Assessment is a vital aspect of early childhood education in that it is about articulating kaupapa and mātauranga that underpin practice.
- Assessment is something that happens during everyday practice.
- Assessment is observation based.
- Assessment requires an interpretation that may include reflections and discussion (as we strive to understand our observations).
- Assessment is purposeful (puts our understandings to good use). (Ministry of Education & Rameka, 2009, p. 14)

With these overarching goals guiding the assessment process, ECEs have utilized Te Whatu Pōkeka for providing assessments that are focused on the development of Māori children. Each area was analyzed, discussed, and reviewed in relation to Māori values and beliefs (MP9). The areas of development created include physical, emotional, spiritual, and cognitive. These categories are described and categorized as follows:

- Assessment is something that happens during everyday practice.
- Assessment is observation based.
- Ngā hononga ki te tauparapara (Ways of knowing): (a) Mōhiotanga: what a child already knows and brings with her/him; (b) Mātauranga: a time of growth when the child is learning new ideas; (c) Māramatanga: when a child comes to understand new knowledge.

- Ngā āhuatanga o te tamaiti (Ways of being): (a) Te wairua o te tamaiti: the emotional, spiritual being of the child; (b) He mana tō te tamaiti: the mana and potential with which the child is born; (c) He mauri tangata: the life force and energy of the child.
- Tikanga whakaaro (Ways of doing): (a) Tikanga whakaako: Learning and teaching within a Māori context is based on whanaungatanga and the application of tikanga Māori.
- Te Whatu Pōkeka (Kaupapa Māori assessment): (a) To be Māori and to live as Māori. (Ministry of Education & Rameka, 2009, p. 16)

The Te Whatu Pōkeka assessment tool focuses on the child, “their whole environment, their being, and their surroundings” (MSC). How the environment and surroundings influence the child’s development is taken into consideration.

Te Whatu Pōkeka is built upon one Māori perspective. For example, one of the stories shared on how Te Whatu Pōkeka has been used as an assessment tool in ECE centres is shared below:

There was a little boy who was showing qualities of *tinihanga*, which is a Māori word that can be used to describe deceitful behaviours; yet it is very different from the western meaning of deceitful. Cunning would be another way to explain *tinihanga*, and being cunning is viewed as an important part of Māori survival. We have needed to be cunning in the past for survival, and having children who are cunning are needed in our communities. It is a very different perspective of what is valued in today’s society.

Another valued characteristic is having cheekiness; cheeky children is something that is in Māori society that people just love and think it is great. They want their children to be a little bit cheeky and cunning, to be able to maneuver through situations and make

decisions quickly. These skills are shown as Chiefly skills, for this particular little boy he was showing chiefly behaviours. The teacher could easily have said the boy was being naughty; instead his behaviours were seen as qualities that our Chiefs needed to have (MP9)

This story is an example of how viewing Māori children's behaviours differently can change a person's perspective of the behaviours, as either acceptable or not. This Māori perspective views all behaviours in accordance to skills that were needed for survival and the ability to thrive in situations. When viewing behaviours such as deceitfulness, cunningness, or cheekiness as skills, the perspective changes from a negative behaviour to a positive behaviour and skill. When shared with parents and caregivers, these stories and perspectives lead to discussions about viewing their child's behaviours in a more positive light.

When providing Te Whatu Pōkeka assessments, ECEs need to be aware of "the lenses that they are wearing and be able to view the child through a different lens" (MP9). The teacher's cultural background will influence how he/she views a Māori child and his/her development. Once the ECEs determine an area that they want to conduct an assessment on, they will share the story of the child and his/her development with the parents (MSC). Te Whatu Pōkeka will also support and enhance the connection that the teacher has with the child. It prompts teachers to question themselves regarding the child, such as, "Do I know who you are? Do I know where you have come from?" (MP9). Questions such as these create an opportunity to know the child on a deeper level and make connections to his/her ancestors, history, and to the child's tribe. Te Whatu Pōkeka has opened the doors to change perspectives, not only for teachers but also for parents and caregivers.

The journey of developing Te Whatu Pōkeka had many successes and challenges. Some of the successes included the following: (a) the centres that are using Te Whatu Pōkeka have gone back to using Māori culture and beliefs; (b) the perspectives on Māori child development and valued learning has positively changed; (c) this assessment focuses on the child and his or her strengths and skills; (d) the Māori participants were clear in describing Te Whatu Pōkeka as one Māori perspective to be used; (e) an assessment tool has been created that is timeless; and (f) the assessment tool can be used in the future, as it is based upon Māori worldview and the stories of their ancestors (MSC). Currently there are “social workers using the assessment tool, Kindergarten teachers, and some mainstream service providers” (MP9), which proves the relevance of using an assessment tool for Māori children that is based upon Māori worldview.

Some of the challenges that were faced throughout the journey of development included the following: (a) removing the Western ways of thinking, and decolonizing everything that was taught for child assessments; (b) working through the uncertainty that participants went through in not knowing whether they were doing the right thing by creating something different; (c) collaborating with and supporting staff who were struggling in adopting a new or old ways of thinking; (d) consistently advocating for required professional development in using the tool; and (e) ensuring appropriate use of the tool when completing an assessment for a Māori child (MSC).

Findings from the First Nations ECE's in BC

In reviewing the findings from the research discussions with the First Nations ECEs in BC, I will share some of the current assessment tools that are being used, the experiences had by First Nations ECE's in using Western society assessment tools for assessing First Nations children; the ways that current assessment tools are being culturally adapted or modified; and the need for the development of an assessment tool that is inclusive of culture and spirituality.

Some of the current assessment tools that are being used with First Nations children in BC include the Ages and Stages Questionnaires [ASQ] (Oregon, 2015), *Batelle Developmental Inventory* (Harcourt, 2015), and the Nipissing District Developmental Screen (Nipissing District Association, 2015). Positive feedback given when using these assessment tools for First Nations children included the fact that these assessment tools may capture an area of development with which a child is struggling and these findings could be used to advocate for more supports and services for First Nations children (FNSC).

There were identified concerns and challenges that arose from using assessment tools for First Nations children. They are listed below:

- they are not inclusive of First Nations' worldview;
- they do not have a category or area to capture spiritual or cultural beliefs for child development;
- they may hinder dialogue or conversation with parents and caregivers;
- they focused on a child's deficits and were not strengths based, and;
- they focused on kindergarten and school readiness capabilities. (FNSC)

Two Nations in Canada have culturally adapted the ASQ: the Syilx Nation in BC and the Kahnawake Nation in Ontario. Both nations voiced the importance of creating an assessment tool that is built upon Indigenous worldview to create a safe space to dialogue about healthy child development (Blind Creek Consulting, 2015; Rother, 2015).

The following reflects the positive feedback on culturally adapting tools such as the ASQ. The two Nations were able to adapt how the ASQ was implemented; they were able to gather data on the child's overall development and better met their cultural needs; the teachers implementing the tool could adapt or modify the questions that were being asked by using items

from their own centre or community; the teacher could take the time required to implement the assessment over as many sessions needed; the teacher worked in partnership with parents or caregivers; and the ASQ tool was used as a tool for conversation on the child's development (FNSC).

Some of the concerns or negative feedback that BC First Nations had when adapting the tools included the following: the assessment tools were based on Western worldview and the way they determine a child develops; the teachers implementing the tool could adapt how they implemented the tool but not the wording or intent of the questions; and the assessment tools were not inclusive of spirituality (FNSC).

Enthusiastic discussion took place with First Nations in BC on the need to develop an assessment tool that is based upon First Nations worldview. First Nations ECE participants discussed the pros and cons of creating another assessment tool. It became clear that "the current assessment tools did not look at self-identity, spirituality, and overall wellbeing of a First Nations child" (FNP10). Consensus was had from all participants, to ensure that the entire developmental process of creating an assessment tool for First Nations children in BC takes place in the future.

Major Themes from Both Māori and First Nations

Six major themes arose from the data analysis from both the Māori and the First Nations ECEs. Collectively, the participants identified the first theme as the need to build an Indigenous inquiry upon a relational process (FNSC; MSC). The second theme was inclusion of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Community for guidance and direction for the entire research journey. The inclusion of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Community is imperative for clarity of the academic and personal motivations for the research journey (Kovach, 2009). The third theme was the inclusion of Culture and Spirituality as foundational to the developmental and

implementation process. Participants from the Māori group expressed that “having faith and trusting the process shows a part of Indigenous spirituality” (MSC). The fourth theme, inclusion of Oral Storytelling, was identified as an important aspect in gathering information on child development and based upon what our ancestors believed to be true. Orality as a means of transmitting knowledge and reciprocity honours a relational process in gathering information and feedback (Kovach, 2010). The fifth theme was inclusion of a decolonization process, which encourages movement towards a holistic view of child development. Smith (2012) wrote, “it is about centring our concerns and worldviews and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes” (p. 41). Such reasoning is transferrable to the need for a holistic child development tool based on a First Nation’s worldview. Lastly, the sixth theme was that the tool created needs to be child-focused and strengths-based. This means the child is at the centre of all discussion and the focus is on her/his strengths that can be built upon as opposed to a focus on her/his deficits.

Relational Process

The theme of Relational Process emerged from the discussions as an identified priority. In particular, this theme was highlighted for when a researcher is conducting research or creating a new resource within an Indigenous community. Participants shared that positive relationships were foundational to building strong working relationships, which support progress for research projects. Wilson (2008) wrote, “a relational way of being was at the heart of what it means to be Indigenous” (p. 80); in other words, the relationships between researcher and community members are key to developing a project that is built upon respect, honour, and Indigenous worldview. Both of these points were supported by my participants.

Participants from BC validated the importance of the developmental process by expressing that adequate time would be taken to create and maintain relationships to ensure that the relationship was built and grounded upon a strong ethical foundation (FNSC). If discussions were to take place to develop a First Nation's worldview assessment tool, the research process would be built upon a relational process and grounded in respect, honour, and trust. The group was very clear in outlining that when working with Indigenous communities, the work is about "being respectful, being honest, being open, and making sure that you are very transparent about why you are there, who you are, what the purpose is" (FNSC). Overall it is about being genuine and true to the relationship and how it develops.

The Māori shared from their relational process and confirmed that it took time and effort for participants to discuss stories, information, and share concerns with one another. It was a long process as everything shared would then go back to their respective Iwis', and guidance would be offered on how to proceed (MSC). Key elements that were prominent for the relational process are (a) having sufficient time allotted to consider topics or ideas; (b) having a safe space to openly dialogue about concerns; and (c) ensuring community is included throughout the entire journey providing guidance and direction as the process takes form.

Inclusion of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Community

The inclusion of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, families, and community members was highlighted as a priority when working in an Indigenous community. Every individual will contribute his/her knowledge and wisdom of what he/she believes about his/her children, what he/she wants for his/her children, and what he/she feels pertains to their child's healthy development. All participants clearly identified the need to have this level of involvement in the creation of any new resources or tools for community, especially if the discussion involves their

children and families (FNSC; MSC). This involvement opens up an opportunity for creating and developing resources that are based upon a First Nation's worldview and that are inclusive of Indigenous knowledge and history. As Smith (2012) articulated, "Indigenous peoples want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own way, for our own purposes" (p. 29). This statement is consistent with the discussions among members of both the Maori and FN focus groups. People bring forth their own perspectives and opinions for developing a new resource or tool and create awareness for each topic for cultural relevancy and appropriateness.

The Māori group working on Te Whatu Pōkeka had a project Elder, otherwise known as a Kaumātua (MSC). This Elder provided support, guidance, and direction to the entire process. Each individual who was participating on the development team also had his/her respected Kaumātua who would contribute her/his advice and knowledge to the process in between team meetings. The development team also had an advisory committee, which included early childhood experts, community members, and educators working in the field of early childhood development. During the developmental process, the working group continually met with its respective communities, which included the Iwi, Kaumātuas and other community members, for feedback on how the process was developing. This inclusion process ensured the Iwis and community members were continually aware of how Te Whatu Pōkeka was progressing and held the developmental team accountable to each community.

Inclusion of Culture and Spirituality

Throughout all discussions in Aotearoa and First Nations, all participants felt strongly about and believed that culture and spirituality were foundational to all that is done within Indigenous communities (FNSC; MSC). Just as Kovach (2009) spoke to the importance of researcher preparation, self-location, reflexivity, and incorporation of ceremony and prayer

within Indigenous research projects, each of these components is guided by the culture and spirituality of the researcher and the Indigenous community within which he or she is researching. . The Kahnawake and Syilx Nations also confirm the importance of including culture and spirituality through the development phase. When they created their cultural adaptation resources to support the implementation of the ASQ for their children, they recognized the need “to develop tools and programs that reflect the unique culture and linguistics richness” (Rother, 2015, p. 2). The Kahnawake’s image of their children is influenced by their Mohawk culture. They believe:

We view the child holistically, recognizing the inter-connectedness of their spiritual, physical, intellectual and emotional selves which we represent through the medicine wheel. We believe even the youngest of children are capable, creative and complete human beings. We understand human learning and development – both in children and adults – to also be inter-woven with people, their histories and their environment. We are part of a larger whole. (Rother, 2015)

Their beliefs guided the development of the cultural adaptation tool that was inclusive of spirituality, physical development, intellectual development and emotional development.

When the Māori were developing Te Whatu Pōkeka, they shared that the entire process was guided by their spiritual beliefs and their culture of having faith in the process. If this process was meant to be, it would happen in a positive way (MSC). Another form of spiritual guidance and culture for the Māori was to ensure that everyone’s Mana or energy was upheld and that at no point would anyone be hurt or seen in a negative way (MP9).

For both the Māori and First Nations, an Elder or Kaumātua offered an opening prayer before any discussions happened in relation to the work that was to be done. The opening prayer

would have been inclusive of the language, song, and story of the Indigenous lands upon which the gathering was held. The opening prayer is significant in that it clearly shows one way that Indigenous people practice reciprocity and ethical ways of conducting business. To move the discussion forward in an ethical way, gratitude and prayers were offered to the animals, the water, the land, and the people – all that we, as humans, are in relation to (FNSC; MSC). The offering of prayer to all that we are in relation to creates balance and harmony, which in turn connects us with ancestors and ensures we are mindful of those to come.

The opportunity to review, analyze, critique, and rewrite practices and procedures that are based upon Indigenous worldviews provides the opportunity to create resources and tools that are culturally appropriate and relevant for Indigenous children. The BC Aboriginal Child Care Society (2011) stated:

The Aboriginal perspective on children's growth and development is holistic and it includes the spiritual domain. Children's physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual health and well-being overlap and are intertwined. Each child's growth and development reflects his or her uniqueness. Patterns of development are inseparable from the cultures in which children are raised. (p. iv)

Inclusion of Oral Storytelling

The inclusion of oral storytelling brings Indigenous worldview to the forefront of research. For Indigenous people, storytelling is a way to pass on knowledge, values, beliefs, teachings, and practices from one generation to another (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012). Through storytelling lessons, learning and practices are passed on to the children and youth, which in turn will be passed on when it is time.

The Māori participants “went back to the creation stories and how they came to be, it’s about how we see the world and being within this world” (MP9). Once they remembered the importance of their creation stories, the memories allowed for discussion to take place about how these stories would be interpreted in today’s world. The participants noticed a phenomenon during the process that they recounted during the research:

All of the centre’s went back to what is important, what is important from the past to bring forward, what were our important concepts, what were our important ideals . . . so what we did was we laid the foundation of the creation stories and traditional Māori ways of seeing the child, traditional Māori ways of seeing and looking at education, traditional Māori ways of the environment that provided for children to grow (MP9).

The assessment tool Te Whatu Pōkeka was created using the Māori creation stories. The opportunity to share stories and return to the creation stories for the Māori people brought them to a space of remembering what was important to them and what it meant for healthy Māori child development.

Smith (2012) described how story connects generation to generation: “The story and the storyteller both serve to connect the past, with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people and the people with the story” (p. 146). For example, throughout my personal journey of transition from being a child to becoming a young woman, my aunties and uncles shared stories as a way of sharing lessons and opportunities for learning. Storytelling is foundational to creating a tool for assessing child development as stories hold the lessons that need to be passed on, and they provide direction for guiding children in a positive way. Storytelling is connected to a relational process in that, through the sharing of stories, a relationship is built between the storyteller and receiver.

During the sharing circles with the First Nations, many stories were shared on how their ancestors guided their children; provided ceremonies when children were moving from one age group into another, such as womanhood or manhood ceremonies; and how they knew a young person was ready to move on (FNSC) They expressed the importance of including storytelling as a way to gather information on Indigenous child development from the Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

Inclusion of Decolonization Process

Storytelling is a key component for inclusion within Indigenous research and “story as methodology is decolonizing research” (Kovach, 2009, p. 103). The Māori participants shared that a central part of the creation of Te Whatu Pōkeka was a decolonization process, or as they described it, “reclaiming, reframing, recentring through storytelling” (MP9). They explained that it was necessary for all the Māori participants to examine, critique, and analyze what they were taught from Western society for child development. Then it was necessary to examine, critique and analyze their creation stories to determine which ones would be used to support the development of Te Whatu Pōkeka. It was described as “a process of taking away the Western thinking and reclaiming the traditional Māori ways of thinking; then reframing it for modern context of early childhood development” (MSC). This process brought forth what they valued and what they believed to be important for their Māori children and child development

Through storytelling, conversations, and discussions, opportunities arose for decolonization to transpire. Smith (2012) wrote:

Language of possibility, a language that can be controlled by those who have possession of it, allows us to make plans, to make strategic choices, to theorize solutions. Imagining a different world, or reimagining the world, is a way into theorizing the reasons why the

world we experience is unjust, and posing alternatives to such a world from within our own worldviews. (p. 204)

Time and effort are needed to move through a decolonization process; yet it is crucial for creating a strong foundation for a First Nations holistic view of child development. Each area of development overlaps and is reflective upon each individual child. Affording time for decolonization allows for reflection and critical thought to ways in which we include the spiritual and emotional domains into Indigenous assessment tools. A decolonization process would need to include each area of development, including how they influence each other.

Child Focused and Strengths Based

Lastly, participants clearly articulated that an assessment tool created upon a First Nations worldview must be child focused and highlight the strengths of the child. Participants shared that, “it is important to keep the child at the centre of the assessment and learn what they are good at; what their strengths are and build upon them; and include the family history as it is the foundation for the child” (FNSC, MSC).

The Māori shared the importance of building an assessment tool that views the child’s strengths, interests, and prior knowledge, and of taking the time to look deeper into the child’s family and history (MSC). Each of these categories showcases the child and his or her development. They promote positive interactions and lessons between the child and his or her teachers. When the ECE knows a child on a deeper level, this knowing provides the opportunity to change negative perspectives to positive ones. This shift in perspective enables parents, caregivers, or teachers to view the child from a strengths-based perspective and allows the adults to focus on supporting the child’s areas of strength. This in turn will encourage development in the challenging areas.

With these six themes in place as guiding points, discussions can begin to take place with local First Nations in BC who are committed to the creation of an assessment tool that is built upon a First Nations worldview and that is reliable, valid, and culturally relevant.

Conclusion

This research project looked at the possibility of developing an assessment tool for First Nations Early Childhood Development community services that is respectful of First Nations worldview and, therefore, culturally relevant, valid, and reliable. By analysing current literature and the data gathered for this research project, I have concluded that it would be realistic and appropriate to create an assessment tool for First Nations child development.

The Māori people in New Zealand provided their wisdom and knowledge on how they developed and created an assessment tool for Māori children that is based upon Māori worldview. Based on their guidance and advice, sharing circles, conversations, and stories took place with First Nations ECEs in BC to discuss the need for creating an assessment tool that is based upon First Nations worldviews. Through these discussions, six themes arose from the data shared by the Māori and the First Nations ECEs in BC. These themes were consistent with those from the literature. This consistency will provide direction for developing any new resources or tools with Indigenous people.

In reviewing the themes, first and foremost, the need to build an Indigenous inquiry upon a relational process was identified. Then the following were identified as important to include: (a) Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community for guidance and direction; (b) parents or caregivers, extended families, and communities; (c) culture and spirituality; (d) oral storytelling; and (e) a decolonization process. Lastly, to recognize the importance of keeping the focus on the child and his/her developmental needs, ECEs must ensure the process is child focused and strengths-based.

There were two identified First Nations, the Carrier Sekani Nation and the N'lakapm'x Nation, that have expressed interest in moving forward to the discussion, planning and

developmental phase to create an assessment tool that is based upon their worldviews. The recommendation from the Māori of working with a few tribes or Iwi, otherwise known in BC as Nations, to support their own creation of an assessment tool is instrumental in moving forward. Through the developmental process, each of the themes recommended will be used to guide this process as it unfolds.

Applicability to Social Work

The six themes identified provide guidance and can influence how social workers relate with Indigenous people. These identified areas must be taken into consideration whenever a social worker is working with Indigenous people. Whether they are directly supporting a child or client, creating new programs, or developing or changing policies. It is critical to take the time to build strong working relationships with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, family, and community as they are an integral component of a child's or client's support system. This support system will be an extension of the services provided by social workers.

This research validated the need to move forward in working with the Carrier Sekani Nation and the N'lakapm'x Nation in B.C to develop an assessment tool that is based upon First Nations worldviews. This needs to happen in partnership with academia to ensure the cultural relevancy, validity, and reliability in the assessment and development tools used for Indigenous children.

Appendix A: Tere Gilbert Support Letter

16 February 2015

**University of the Fraser Valley,
Human Research Ethics Board,
33844 King Road
Abbotsford
BC V2S7M8**

Tēnā koe

I write this letter in support of Sue Sterling to visit my early childhood centre, Te Kōhao Kōhungahunga in Hamilton, New Zealand. Sue is welcome to come to our centre to meet with and interview staff and parents, and to learn about the Whatu Pōkeka Assessment Tool that we use with our indigenous (Māori) children in our centre.

If you require further information, please contact me through my email,

[REDACTED]

Ngā mihi

[REDACTED]

**Tere Gilbert
Tumuaki
Te Kōhao Kōhungahunga**

“Whaia tau e hiahia ai, kia eke ai ki te taumata”

**Te Kohao Health Ltd, Kirikiriroa Marae, 180 Dey St, PO Box 7107, KIRIKIRIROA, Ph: (07)856 5479, Fax: (07) 856 5938
Email: admin@tekohaohealth.co.nz**

Appendix B: Dr. Lesley Rameka Support Letter

Sue Sterling,
Aboriginal Early Childhood Development Consultant
Interior Region of BC
Merritt, British Columbia

25th March 2015

Kia ora Sue, Nga mihi mahana ki a koe,

I understand that you require confirmation of my willingness to be interviewed for your University of the Fraser Valley Ethics Application. Yes I can confirm that I am happy to be a participant in your research and be interviewed on the process of developing Whatu Pōkeka Kaupapa Maori Assessment for Learning, Early Childhood Exemplars.

If there is any further information required please contact me.

Mauriora
Naku noa, na

Dr Lesley Rameka
Faculty of Education,
Victoria University of Wellington,
Wellington New Zealand
04-463 9500

Appendix C: BCACCS Support Letter**BC Aboriginal
Child Care Society**

102 — 100 Park Royal South
West Vancouver, BC V7T 1A2
Telephone: (604) 913-9128 Facsimile: (604) 913-9129

April 7, 2015

Attn: Human Research Ethics Committee
c/o The University of the Fraser Valley
338844 King Road
Abbotsford, BC
V2S-7M8

RE: LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR SUZANNE STERLING (MSW RESEARCH)

I am writing this letter in support of Sue (Suzanne) Sterling's proposal to conduct research with our agency. She is approved to meet and interview First Nations Early Childhood Educators, parents and caregivers on the topic of **Assessment and Evaluation Process for First Nations Early Childhood Development**. As you may be aware, BCACCS has been working with BC First Nations and other Aboriginal communities since 1996 to support and facilitate research, policy, and development of ECE practice tools that are culturally relevant, valid and reliable. We believe Ms. Sterling's research proposal supports our agency's goals and so we are happy to support this research.

If you have any questions or concerns feel free to contact me at (604)913-9128 or by e-mail at: karen@acc-society.bc.ca.

Sincerely,

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of Karen Isaac.

Karen Isaac
Executive Director

Copy: Mary Teegee, President

Appendix D: Invitation Letter for Aotearoa/New Zealand

September 15th, 2015

RE: The Possibility of Developing an Assessment or Evaluation Process for First Nations

ECD

Hello, my name is Sue Sterling and I am currently doing my Masters of Social Work (MSW) degree with the University of the Fraser Valley. I am a First Nations person from the N'lakapm'x Nation, which is located within the Interior Region of BC and I work with First Nations communities providing Early Childhood Development (ECD) services. I will be visiting Aotearoa from October 17 – November 20 which gives me the opportunity to visit and share wisdom and learnings with likeminded Indigenous Early Childhood Educators.

I am currently completing my Masters of Social Work and a component of my MSW Degree is to complete a research project. Not enough is known on how we accurately measure the quality and effectiveness of community-based programs that are being provided for First Nations children in BC, without the use of typical mainstream assessment and evaluation tools. I will be conducting my research on the developmental and relational process to creating an Indigenous approach for assessments or evaluations for ECD programs and the children they serve. This learnings will look into the possibility of developing an assessment or evaluation process for First Nations ECD community services that are respectful of First Nations worldview and in turn culturally responsive, relevant, valid and reliable.

In researching other Indigenous populations using assessment and evaluation tools, I came across the tool the Maori people developed called *Whatu Pokeka* and *Nga Mahi Whai Hua*. I am interested in learning about the development process of these tools, the successes and challenges, any barriers, what you might do differently and how it is working today? I would like to learn of ways of providing assessments for children and evaluations for ECE programs that are respectful of Indigenous worldviews and culturally relevant, valid and reliable.

I invite you to share about the process of the development of these tools and key learning's through a sharing circle or interview process? I would like to gather important points to be aware of and key findings from the Maori process that can be shared through cross cultural learning. If you are willing to be a participant in a sharing circle or an interview please confirm with me through email stating that I am welcome to come to your centre to meet with and learn about the *Whatu Pokeka Assessment Tool* and/or the *Nga Mahi Whai Hua* self-evaluation process.

If you require more information you can reach me by email at

████████████████████ or ████████████████████. If you would prefer to discuss this project in person we could arrange for a skype call. Thank you for your time and consideration and please address the confirmation to the University of the Fraser Valley, Human Research Ethics Board, 33844 King Road, Abbotsford BC, V2S-7M8.

Sincerely Yours,

Suzanne Sterling
MSW Student
University of the Fraser Valley

Appendix E: Invitation Letter for First Nations in BC

November 4th, 2015

RE: Possibility of Developing an Assessment or Evaluation Process for First Nations

ECD

Dear participant,

Hello, how are you doing? I am currently doing my Masters of Social Work (MSW) degree with the University of the Fraser Valley. A component of my MSW Degree is to complete a research project this fall 2015 and winter 2016 and I will be conducting my MSW research on the process to creating an Indigenous approach to establishing an assessment or evaluation process for First Nations Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs and the children they serve. Not enough is known on how we accurately measure the quality and effectiveness of community-based programs that are being provided for First Nations children without the use of typical mainstream assessment and evaluation tools. My research will look into the possibility of developing an assessment or evaluation process for First Nations ECD community services that are respectful of First Nations worldview and in turn culturally responsive, relevant, valid and reliable.

In researching other Indigenous populations using assessment and evaluation tools, I came across the tool the Maori people developed called *Whatu Pokeka* and *Nga Mahi Whai Hua*. I am interested in learning about the development process of these tools, the successes and challenges, any barriers, what they might have done differently and how it is working today? I will be researching ways of providing assessments for children and evaluations for ECE programs that are respectful of Indigenous worldviews and are culturally relevant, valid and reliable.

I will be conducting a second component of this research with First Nations Early Childhood Educators in BC to learn what they feel are key components that would need to be included within an assessment process and/or evaluation process that is created and developed by First Nations people for First Nations children and ECE programs?

I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you and/or your staff by inviting you to participate in a sharing circle or an interview to share feedback on this important topic. Please confirm with me through email or by telephone to confirm your attendance. If you would like more information, you can reach me by telephone at [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED]. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely Yours,

Suzanne Sterling, MSW Student

University of the Fraser Valley

Appendix F: Aotearoa/NZ Sharing Circle Questions**The Possibility of Developing an Assessment or Evaluation Process for First Nations****Early Childhood Development****Aotearoa/NZ Sharing Circle Questions**

Principal Investigator: Suzanne Sterling, BSW, MSW Student

University of the Fraser Valley

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

1. Please share the process in how the tools *Whatu Pokeka* and *Nga Mahi Whai Hua* were created?
 - a. Who was involved in the process? Elders and Knowledge Keepers? Ministry of Education involvement? Who funded the projects?
2. How did Maori traditional values and beliefs guide the process?
 - a. Kaupapa Maori?
3. What were some of the challenges and barriers in creating these tools?
 - a. Pilot Project feedback? Challenges and barriers faced during the Pilot Projects?
4. What were some of the successes in creating the tools?
 - a. Success stories during the Pilot Projects?
5. How are the tools working today? Successes, challenges and barriers?
 - a. What does the process look like when implementing the tools? For Assessment? For evaluation?
6. Is there anything you would have done differently?
7. Would you have included anyone else in the development process that was not a part of the process from the beginning? Was the working relationship jeopardized in any way?
 - a. Positive or Negative experiences in the relational process during the development stages?
8. Would you be willing to participate in further research on this topic?

Appendix G: First Nations in BC Sharing Circle Questions**The Possibility of Developing an Assessment or Evaluation Process for First Nations****Early Childhood Development****First Nations in BC Sharing Circle Questions**

Principal Investigator: Suzanne Sterling, BSW, MSW Student

University of the Fraser Valley

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

1. What are some successes in using mainstream assessment/evaluation tools for First Nations children?
2. What are some challenges and/or barriers in using mainstream assessment/evaluation tools for First Nations children?
3. How would our ancestors have implemented an assessment or evaluation process based upon traditional values and beliefs?
 - a. Any examples? Aunties or Uncles traditional roles and responsibilities in supporting their nieces and nephews development?
 - b. How would we have measured quality supports for our children?
4. What traditional values and beliefs would be our guiding principles?
 - a. Teaching respect? Teaching the concept of sharing?
5. How would we have traditionally measured or assessed our children's development?
 - a. Physical development? Social skill development?
6. What would have been measured? How would we have done this?
7. What needs to be included in an assessment or evaluation process to ensure we are following traditional protocols?
8. Would you be open to further research on this topic?

Appendix H: Before/After Sharing Circle Outline

Before Sharing Circle:

1. Introduce myself; depending on cultural protocol I will thank the first peoples and the traditional territory that we are conducting our business on.
2. Dependent on cultural protocol; possible opening prayer or welcoming prayer.
3. Lead introductions of participants to one another, sharing who they are, where they are from, and what they do for work.
4. Remind participants that they can choose to have an individual interview, if they prefer.
5. Explain the interview process. There will be open-ended questions and that there are no right or wrong answers.
6. Explain to participants that I will be using a digital recording device to capture our discussion and it will remain confidential. It will be transcribed by myself and kept on my computer that is password protected.
7. Let participants know that snacks and coffee/tea/juice are available for them during the focus group and that we will be providing lunch/dinner at the end of the focus group and they are free to stay and enjoy lunch with the group.
8. Remind participants that they can withdraw from the focus group at any time by verbally asking to do so. They are still welcome to join us for lunch/dinner afterwards, even if they withdraw.
9. Read consent form to the participants, and then allow participants to read the form.
10. Answer any questions the participants may have. If participants agree, sign one consent form and give an unsigned copy to each participant.
11. Remind participants that if they feel uncomfortable at any time to let me know.
12. Ask participants if there are any questions, and once answered, begin interview.

After Sharing Circle:

1. Thank the participants, and ask if they have any questions
2. Ensure participant knows that if anything arises, if they have anything else to say or add; they can contact the researcher at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]
3. If they have any ethical questions or concerns they can contact Adrienne Chan, Associate VP of Research and Graduate Studies at UFV, (604) 557-4074 or adrienne.chan@ufv.ca.
4. If anything arises for counseling concerns they can contact a local counselor. I will have contact info for each community.
5. Acknowledge each participant individually for their participation; including gifts to honor Elders or Knowledge Keepers.
6. Close focus group/sharing circle with a prayer; including prayer for lunch/dinner.

Appendix I: Before/After Interview Questions Outline

Before Interview Process:

1. Introduce myself and thank them for being willing to participate in this research project. I will acknowledge the first peoples and the traditional territory that we are conducting our business on.
2. Explain the interview process. There will be open-ended questions and that there are no right or wrong answers.
3. Explain that I will be using a digital recording device to capture our discussion and it will remain confidential. It will be transcribed by myself and kept on my computer that is password protected.
4. Let participants know that they can withdraw from the interview process at any time by verbally asking to do so.
5. Read consent form to the participant, and then allow participant to read the form.
6. Answer any questions the participant may have. If participant agree, sign one consent form and give an unsigned copy to them.
7. Remind participant that if they feel uncomfortable at any time to let me know.
8. Ask participant if there are any questions, and once answered, begin interview.

After Interview Process:

1. Thank the participant, and ask if they have any questions
2. Ensure participant knows that if anything arises, if they have anything else to say or add; they can contact the researcher at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]
3. If they have any ethical questions or concerns they can contact Adrienne Chan, Associate VP of Research and Graduate Studies at UFV, (604) 557-4074 or adrienne.chan@ufv.ca.
4. If anything arises for counseling concerns they can contact a local counselor. I will have contact info for each community.
5. Acknowledge them for their participation; including a gift to honor the sharing of their wisdom.

Appendix J: Participant Consent Form for Aotearoa/New Zealand**The Possibility of Developing an Assessment or Evaluation Process for First Nations****Early Childhood Development**

Principal Investigator: Suzanne Sterling, BSW, MSW Student

University of the Fraser Valley

Abbotsford, BC, Canada

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I am interested in learning about the development process of the assessment and evaluation tools called *Whatu Pokeka* and *Nga Mahi Whai Hua*. I value your participation in the development of these tools and your input into how they are being used today by yourself and your Early Childhood Centre. I am particularly interested in the process of developing the tools, who and what was involved, how did the process move forward, and what the there barriers were. I would like to learn about the successes and challenges in developing these tools and what might have done differently. I would also like to know how the tools are being used today with Maori children and Maori Early Childhood Education centres.

I will be conducting a second component of this research with First Nations Early Childhood Educators in British Columbia, Canada to learn what they believe are culturally relevant and key components that would need to be included within an assessment process and/or evaluation process that is created and developed by First Nations people for First Nations children and ECE programs? The key themes between the two research components will be shared and analyzed on the importance of culturally responsive and relevant processes within the creation of assessment and evaluation tools for Indigenous children and ECE programs. This will aid me in researching ways of providing assessments for children and evaluations for ECE programs that are respectful of Indigenous worldviews and culturally relevant, valid and reliable.

Background and Purpose of the Sharing Circle or an Individual Interview

At the Sharing Circle, participants will sit in a small circle and share their learning experiences from the development process of *Whatu Pokeka* and/or *Nga Mahi Whai Hua*. We will have a discussion on the successes and challenges in developing these tools, any barriers that were faced, and how the tools are being implemented today.

If you participate through an individual interview process, you will share your experiences about the developmental process of *Whatu Pokeka* and/or *Nga Mahi Whai Hua*. We will discuss the successes and challenges in developing these tools, any barriers that were faced, how the tools are being implemented today and any recommendations in developing or implementing these tools with ECE.

The findings of this research study will be published as part of my MSW Major Paper, published by the University of the Fraser Valley Library and may be presented at the University of the Fraser Valley, in the community, at professional conferences, and/or for publications in journals. The researcher will present the findings informally and formally to the participants through presentations in person or via skype for Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Participant Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you were a part of the development of the *Whatu Pokeka* and/or *Nga Mahi Whai Hua* tools and/or you are an Early Childhood Educator that currently utilizes these tools within your ECE Centre.

What is Involved

If you are participating in a sharing circle it will give us an opportunity to discuss these topics in a group and will last approximately 2-3 hours. If you are participating in an individual interview, you will be asked questions that will guide the discussion to gather information on these topics and it will last approximately 1-2 hours. Your name or any other identifying information will not be used and you can decide whether or not you would like to participate in the sharing circle or in an interview.

Once they are complete I will honor your sharing of your wisdom and knowledge with a token of my appreciation and lunch/dinner.

Possible Risks and Side Effects of Participating

Participation in this sharing circle or individual interview will be required to delegate a time commitment of 2-3 hours to participate and may be required to travel to the gathering space. I will compensate any participants if they require travel to attend with a fuel card to cover the cost of fuel and provide lunch/dinner afterwards to provide an opportunity of extended relationship building and to show appreciation of their time and effort.

Participants may experience emotional discomfort in the form of historical trauma, stress and distress; as the topic of discussion will be about self-determination and self-governance of Indigenous people creating assessment and evaluation tools for Indigenous children.

If participants experience emotional discomfort in the form of stress or distress I will provide an opportunity to debrief with the group at the end of our sessions and I will ensure that there is an identified person for counseling services.

Benefits of Participating

Your wisdom, knowledge and opinions are valuable and they will help with the development of identifying the key themes that are important in creating a culturally responsive and relevant processes within the creation of assessment and evaluation tools for Indigenous children and ECE programs.

Withdrawal of Consent to Participate

Your participation in this sharing circle or individual interview is entirely voluntary and you may leave at any time. Anything that is shared before withdrawing from the sharing circle cannot be removed, because it will have contributed to the research. If you wish to withdraw from an individual interview your information can be deleted.

Rights and Compensation

There will be no cost to you for participating in this research and by signing this form you agree to participate in the sharing circle or an individual interview to contribute to this research.

Confidentiality

Your name and any other information that may identify you as a participant will not be used. Your confidentiality in an individual interview will be maintained and respected. We will ask all participants in sharing circles to keep all information shared and discussed to remain confidential, however I cannot guarantee that they will do this.

Contacts

If I have any questions about this study, I should contact Suzanne Sterling at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. If I have any ethical concerns or complaints about this research you may contact Adrienne Chan, Associate VP of Research and Graduate Studies at UFV, (604) 557-4074 or adrienne.chan@ufv.ca.

This ethics of this research project has been reviewed and approved by the UFV Human Research Ethics Board.

The Possibility of Developing an Assessment or Evaluation Process for First Nations**Early Childhood Development****Consent to Participate Form**

By signing below I agree to participate in the study **The Possibility of Developing an Assessment or Evaluation Process for First Nations Early Childhood Development**. I have read and understood the participant information and consent form and am consenting to participate in the sharing circle being held by Suzanne Sterling.

I have had sufficient time to consider the information provided and to ask questions if needed. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am able to withdraw from this study at any moment without question. I have been told that I will receive a signed and dated copy of this form.

If I have any questions about this study, I should contact Suzanne Sterling at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. If I have any ethical concerns or complaints about this research you may contact Adrienne Chan, Associate VP of Research and Graduate Studies at UFV, (604) 557-4074 or adrienne.chan@ufv.ca.

By signing I agree to the use of an audio recording during the sharing circle.

_____	_____	_____
Printed Name of Participant	Signature	Date

_____	_____	_____
Printed Name of Witness	Signature	Date

Appendix K: Participant Consent Form for First Nations in BC**The Possibility of Developing an Assessment or Evaluation Process for First Nations****Early Childhood Development**

Principal Investigator: Suzanne Sterling, BSW, MSW Student

University of the Fraser Valley

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I am interested in learning what First Nations Early Childhood Educators in BC believe are culturally relevant and key components that need to be included within an assessment process and/or evaluation process that is created and developed by First Nations people for First Nations children and ECE programs. This will aid me in researching ways of providing assessments for children and evaluations for ECE programs that are respectful of Indigenous worldviews and culturally relevant, valid and reliable.

I will be conducting a second component of this research with the Maori people in New Zealand on the learnings from the development process of the assessment and evaluation tools called *Whatu Pokeka* and *Nga Mahi Whai Hua*. I am particularly interested in the process of developing the tools, who and what was involved, how did the process move forward, and what the barriers were. I would like to learn about the successes and challenges in developing these tools and what might have done differently. I would also like to know how the tools are being used today with Maori children and Maori Early Childhood Education centres.

The key themes between the two research components will be shared and analyzed on the importance of culturally responsive and relevant processes within the creation of assessment and evaluation tools for Indigenous children and ECE programs.

Background and Purpose of the Sharing Circle or an Individual Interview

At the Sharing Circle, participants will sit in a small circle and share and learn what you believe are culturally relevant and key components that would need to be included within an assessment process and/or evaluation process that is created and developed by First Nations people for First Nations children and ECE programs?

If you participate through an individual interview process, you will share your beliefs on culturally relevant and key components that would need to be included within an assessment

process and/or evaluation process that is created by First Nations people for First Nations children and ECE programs.

The key themes between the two research components will be shared and analyzed on the importance of culturally responsive and relevant processes within the creation of assessment and evaluation tools for Indigenous children and ECE programs.

The findings of this research study will be published as part of my MSW Major Paper, published by the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV) Library and may be presented at UFV, in the community, and at professional conferences, and/or for publications in journals. The researcher will present the findings informally and formally to the participants through presentations in person or via skype for Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Participant Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an Early Childhood Educator that works with First Nations children or with a First Nations ECE program.

What is Involved

If you are participating in a sharing circle it will give us an opportunity to discuss these topics in a group and will last approximately 2-3 hours. If you are participating in an individual interview, you will be asked questions that will guide the discussion to gather information on these topics and it will last approximately 1-2 hours. Your name or any other identifying information will not be used and you can decide whether or not you would like to participate in the sharing circle or in an interview.

Once they are complete I will honor your sharing of your wisdom and knowledge with a token of my appreciation and lunch/dinner.

Possible Risks and Side Effects of Participating

Participation in this sharing circle or individual interview will be required to delegate a time commitment of 2-3 hours to participate and may be required to travel to the gathering space. I will compensate any participants if they require travel to attend with a fuel card to cover the cost of fuel and provide lunch/dinner afterwards to provide an opportunity of extended relationship building and to show appreciation of their time and effort.

Participants may experience emotional discomfort in the form of historical trauma, stress and distress; as the topic of discussion will be about self-determination and self-governance of Indigenous people creating assessment and evaluation tools for Indigenous children.

If participants experience emotional discomfort in the form of stress or distress I will provide an opportunity to debrief with the group at the end of our sessions and I will ensure that there is an identified person for counseling services.

Benefits of Participating

Your wisdom, knowledge and opinions are valuable and they will help with the development of identifying the key themes that are important in creating a culturally responsive and relevant process within the creation of assessment and evaluation tools for Indigenous children and ECE programs.

Withdrawal of Consent to Participate

Your participation in this sharing circle or individual interview is entirely voluntary and you may leave at any time. Anything that is shared before withdrawing from the sharing circle cannot be removed, because it will have contributed to the research. If you wish to withdraw from an individual interview your information can be deleted.

Rights and Compensation

There will be no cost to you for participating in this research and by signing this form you agree to participate in the sharing circle or an individual interview to contribute to this research.

Confidentiality

Your name and any other information that may identify you as a participant will not be used. Your confidentiality in an individual interview will be maintained and respected. We will ask all participants in sharing circles to keep all information shared and discussed to remain confidential, however I cannot guarantee that they will do this.

Contacts

If I have any questions about this study, I should contact Suzanne Sterling at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. If I have any ethical concerns or complaints about this research you may contact Adrienne Chan, Associate VP of Research and Graduate Studies at UFV, (604) 557-4074 or adrienne.chan@ufv.ca.

This ethics of this research project has been reviewed and approved by the UFV Human Research Ethics Board.

The Possibility of Developing an Assessment or Evaluation Process for First Nations**Early Childhood Development****Consent to Participate Form**

By signing below I agree to participate in the study **The Possibility of Developing an Assessment or Evaluation Process for First Nations Early Childhood Development**. I have read and understood the participant information and consent form and am consenting to participate in the sharing circle being held by Suzanne Sterling.

I have had sufficient time to consider the information provided and to ask questions if needed. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am able to withdraw from this study at any moment without question. I have been told that I will receive a signed and dated copy of this form.

If I have any questions about this study, I should contact Suzanne Sterling at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. If I have any ethical concerns or complaints about this research you may contact Adrienne Chan, Associate VP of Research and Graduate Studies at UFV, (604) 557-4074 or adrienne.chan@ufv.ca.

By signing I agree to the use of an audio recording during the sharing circle.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature


Date

Printed Name of Witness

Signature

Date

Appendix L: Human Research Ethics Board Approval**Certificate of Human Research Ethics Board Approval**

Contact Person Suzanne Sterling	Department Social Work	Protocol # 764S-15
Co-investigator(s) Leah Douglas; Wenona Victor; Robert Harding		
Title of Project The possibility of developing an assessment and evaluation process for First Nations Early Childhood Development in BC		
Sponsoring/Funding Agency Carrier Sekani Family Services & BC Aboriginal Child Care Society		
Institution(s) where research will be carried out University of the Fraser Valley		
Review Date: 23-Apr-15	Approval Date: 06-May-15	Approval Term: 06-May-15 - 05-May-16
<p>Certification:</p> <p><i>The protocol describing the above-named project has been reviewed by the UFV Human Research Ethics Board, and the procedures were found to be in compliance with accepted guidelines for ethical research.</i></p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>Andrea Hughes, Chair, Human Research Ethics Board</p> <p><i>NOTE: This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above noted term provided there is no change in the procedures or criteria given.</i></p> <p><i>If the project will go beyond the approval term noted above, an extension of approval must be requested.</i></p>		

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